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The Catcher in the Rye: a Free Zone for Will-to-Power

《麦田里的守望者》：权力意志自由释意的文本领域

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Synopsis

As a strand of poststructuralist thought, Foucault's discursive theory together with his concept of "perspectivity of knowledge" declares the death of "transcendental" subject, removes the ground for any truth-telling mental authority, thus opening the way to a new and non-truth-oriented form of historical study of text. It objectively echoes Barthes' anti-humanistic formula in literary criticism expressed in his essay "The Death Of The Author", finally facilitating the climate of anti-realism, relativism and skepticism in Post-World-War-Two intellectual circles. As a result, any literary text, successfully exempted from authorial interpretation, opens up a realm for us readers to have a free play in its signification. While the tongue is freed in interpretation, the reader's "will-to-power" is materialized, leaving the critical writing as its remnant, which is nothing less than another free zone for a free play, since the death of the reader is predestinated.

Above is a brief account of the critical formula I adopt in my study of Salinger's masterpiece *The Catcher in the Rye*. This is a book widely read since its appearance in 1951 with its main character and also its first-person narrator Holden Caulfield, for his nonconformist standing against the conformist pressure of Post-World-War-Two American society, immortalized in American literary history as another mythical cultural hero standing up for individualism with Huck Finn as his forerunner. However, departing from this approved critical mode of Salinger's book, my analysis will show another story. The thesis focuses on the adaptation of Foucault's thought of modern power and the discursive formations to the fictional context where Holden, a middle-class young adult living in 1950's American society, experiences a chain of discursive practices by agents of social control such as Pencey, the Caulfield family, mass media, and witnesses in himself a succession of character formation and transformation all through his social interaction with one group after

another. Tracing Holden's years of life from his childhood, then over an embarrassing adolescence, headlong to his adulthood, we manage to come up with a mapping of Holden's subject constitution as effects of power by social relations, typical of its absurdity, ambiguity, paradox and thus all-inclusiveness. Unruly, insane, alien as he is accused by those packing his life, Holden surfaces above the suffocating thickness of standardized behavior codes of his time as a spokesman for "others", voicing his "otherness" to the full. His self-destructive trick in combination with his signification of "phony" manages to confront those normal outward with their inward "otherness". His reading of modern life and modern people deeply impresses us with the knowledge that spontaneity is the essence of human nature, ambiguity is the nature of modern existence, absurdity is the attribute of modern power, and finally, impotence characterizes modern psyche. Despair sets in with total disillusionment on any absolute-truth claiming. This is the fact of modern life for the adolescent to digest for final maturity.

To define *The Catcher in the Rye* as a growing up novel embodying the theme of "the Quest" to show its continuity with the western literature tradition could hardly encounter any dissent. For the convenience of literary criticism in literary classification, such an agreement is a necessity. It must be the "truth" of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. However, Holden's ambiguous ending together with Salinger's intentional retirement from interpretative authority over his works into an insignificant state suggests both their authorial modesty and their authorial impotence for an interpretative uniformity, thus embodying an absolute truth: there is no absolute truth at all. Their self-dethronement has cleansed the text of any possible confinement by master discourses in the name of critical authority. Thus *The Catcher in the Rye* is and should be a free zone for a free play by a plurality of individual wills to power. In this sense, Holden's narrated discourse can be interpreted as a declaration of free speech with "Holdenization" looming in its wake as an anti-socialization trend heading for re-individualization. Greatly awakened, I feel motivated to conduct an act of reading risking the least violation to integrity and

authenticity of my mind and my literary competence.

Key words: will-to-power; micro-power; the discursive formations; otherness; “Holdenization”

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摘要

作为后结构主义思潮的流派之一，福柯的话语理论及其“知识观点化”的理念共同宣判了“超意识”的死亡，摧毁了界定人们真相意识的权威性，从而为历史文本的研究开辟了一条非以真实性为目的全新方法论，客观上，积极响应了巴特在其文学评论《作者的死亡》中提出的反人文主义的研究思维，无异于促成了二战后笼罩于文坛的反现实主义、相对主义以及怀疑主义的批评气候的形成。其结果为，著作者丧失了对其文本释意的权威地位。文本的开放性于是赋予了读者实践自我释意的自由。对文本的自由释意实践了读者的“权力意志”，读者的批评文本便是权力行使后所留下的意志残骸，读者的意志已经不复存在。因而，读者的死亡便成就了其批评文本的开放性，为其他权力意志提供一片自由释意的文字领域。

笔者便是以这样的文学批评思维来研究塞林格的代表作《麦田里的守望者》。小说于 1951 年出版后，便拥有了广大的读者群，其主人公、小说的第一叙述者霍尔顿·考尔菲德成为继哈克·费恩之后又一位为个人主义精神而战的民族英雄形象而载入美国文学史册，对二战后美国社会压抑人性、同化个性的世俗风气进行不屈不挠的反抗成就了其不朽的光辉形象。但笔者试图用全新的视角来解读塞林格的代表作，将福柯的现代权力论及其话语形构理念应用于小说的文本世界。霍尔顿作为二战后五十年代出生的美国中产阶级少年，经历了一系列来自学校、家庭以及大众传媒对其个性观念的塑造，同时在与众多团体成员的交往中体验了来自于话语对其行为举止所发挥的塑造与再塑造的作用过程。作为社会中的一员，霍尔顿的自我意识、性格品质形成于与周围人物的相互作用之中。笔者于追溯霍尔顿从儿童期，经历尴尬的青春期的变化过程中捕捉出霍尔顿内在一幅极其凌乱的意识构建景观，由多种话语文本拼贴而成，从而造就了其荒诞、茫然以及自相矛盾的现实存在状态。桀骜癫狂，不符礼教，不服管束，霍尔顿在其生存的世界里成为他人眼中的“异类”，成为与战后主导文明分庭抗礼的“他性”的代言人。笔者发现，霍尔顿自我颠覆的

叙事手法事实上颠覆的是现代人理智成熟和循规蹈矩的外在形象，揭露人们内在各种各样的“他性”特征。“假模假样”就是对这种现代矛盾体的最好定义。自发性才是人性的本真；暧昧含糊实乃存在的本质，荒谬性是现代权力的根本属性，无能感深深占据了现代人的生存体验之中。这就是霍尔顿在通往成熟的路途中所得到的对社会、对人生、对生命最根本的感悟。而成熟不过就是意味着能接受这个真相并心安理得地继续生存下去而已。

至今为止，评论界对《麦田里的守望者》有了一个统一的界定：文本内含青少年在成长路上“追寻”的主题，体现了其与西方文学传统的一脉相承，因而是一本传统意义上的成长小说。为了方便评论界对文学体裁的分类，《麦田里的守望者》被视为成长小说乃无可非议。但霍尔顿结束其叙事时的暧昧不清的态度以及塞林格对其小说不置可否、有意隐退的选择，一方面体现了著者的谦逊品质，另一方面，也说明著者无能构建文本的权威释意，从而忠实于其文本所持有的真理观：没有绝对的真理。其文本从而摆脱了任何以评论权威之名加诸于其之上的权威释意。从这个意义出发，霍尔顿的话语文本相当于一本自由言论宣言，随之而来的“霍尔顿化”热潮是对社会化磨灭个性倾向的反拨。因此，《麦田里的守望者》的开放性赋予笔者对其进行最忠实于自我思维和文学能力的评述的权力与自由。

关键词：权力意志；微观权力；话语形构；他性；“霍尔顿化”

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Chapter One Introduction

In order that any society may function well, its members must acquire the kind of character which makes them want to act in the way that they have to act as members of the society or of a special class within it (Riesman, 1970:5). This is the modern concept of social constraints, which turn out to be more oppressive since they operate on the mind rather than merely on the body, especially the formative power of the educational system, which defines what is rational and scholarly. Only recognized teachers of the institution are allowed to determine the ways in which subjects are studied; in a given period only certain kinds of speaking and writing are recognized as valid. It depends on them to determine the nature of human knowledge, imposing its modes of division and of classification, thus compelling individuals to think in a certain way. And each practice is a set of rules and procedures governing writing and thinking in a particular field by wielding the power of discourse. Discourses are produced alongside in which concepts of madness, criminality, sexual abnormality, and so on are defined in relations to concepts of sanity, justice and sexual normality. As a result, people recognize a particular piece of philosophy or scientific theory as “true” only if it fits the descriptions of truth laid down by the intellectual or political authorities of the day, by the members of the ruling elite, or by the prevailing ideologues of knowledge. It follows that individuals working within particular discursive practices cannot think or speak without obeying the unspoken “archive” of rules and constraints, otherwise they risk being condemned to madness or silence (Selden, 1997:184). Individual subject comes into being alongside as the product of the whole formative procedure. Finally, we are all ‘subjects’ of ideology which operates by summoning us to take our places in the social structure. Here is a brief account of Foucault’s mapping of the discursive formations.

Since modern power gets localized in the educational system, for a comprehensive understanding of the discursive formations as a modern form of social administration, it is better for us to make a reference to Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Just as we see, Salinger locates Holden's story within a very specific social world in which the most significant influence is not some generalized concept of American culture or society, but the codes and practices of a particular instrument of social control--the American prep school. Holden's frequent reference to his school life has well exposed to us the operation of discursive practices on Pencey boys. To make a speech in Mr. Vinson's Oral Expression, to unify and simplify and stick to a point is the rule boys should abide by. If anyone digresses, you're supposed to yell "digression!" at him; more seriously, he is in danger of failing the course. The article Holden writes for Stradlater is rejected by the latter because it doesn't follow the rules of the English composition assignment; rather than a room or a house or something a descriptive article is supposed to tell about, Holden writes about the poems on Allie's baseball mitt, which is regarded as an open violation, although only a slight one. These are examples of discursive practices regulating and disciplining Pencey pupils' academic performance. And Holden, who always does everything backwards and doesn't do one thing as he is supposed to, is nevertheless a brave rule-breaker. Dr. Thurmer expects to submit Holden by implanting in him the knowledge that "life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules". His words embody the disciplinary power of discursive practices to standardize pupils' behavior according to certain approved patterns; anyone once deviating, is done with an ax--a policy of punishment to frighten others and consolidate its authorized control. So punishment for Holden subversion should be spectacular enough to frighten other Pencey pupils into consciously normalizing their behavior as expected. Thus "no wonder you're flunking the hell out of here", says Stradlater sarcastically (Salinger, 1964:34).

The body thus is the privileged target of the discursive practices with its next move directed at the moral and psychological level. Such a sophisticated operational mechanism adopted in education gets specified in Mr. Antolini's speech to Holden:

“Your first move will be to apply in school. You’ll have to. You’re a student--whether the idea appeals to you or not. You’re in love with knowledge,...Something else an academic education will do for you. If you go along with it any considerable distance, it’ll begin to give you an idea what size mind you have. What it’ll fit and, maybe, what it won’t. After a while, you’ll have an idea what kind of thoughts your particular size mind should be wearing. For one thing, it may save you an extraordinary amount of time trying on ideas that don’t suit you, aren’t becoming to you. You’ll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly” (Salinger, 1964:256).

Man is thus a simultaneous subject and object of knowledge. Implied in Mr. Antolini’s speech is how to produce a properly-patterned mind and create an approved personality. Thus educational practices are effective enough to guarantee the production of particular consciousnesses since individual subjects are constituted in the ideas that educational institutions deem worthy of being transmitted. Pencey Education is actually the framework of the discursive formations.

So a look into the prep school context becomes a must in our attempt to approach Foucault’s discursive theory, which gets well practiced in those schools Holden ever attends. It is within the immediate, primary context of Pencey Prep, where we first encounter Holden, that we need to situate all the agencies that seek to influence his development, such as the peer group, parents, and the mass media, so as to map out a relatively comprehensive character formation in Holden. As a middle-class young adult within the particular fraction of the middle class whose behavior and psychology are the substance of *The Catcher in the Rye*, shifting for maturity in Post-World-War-Two American society, Holden can find not a moment for a fresh breath out of the suffocating air of his school’s phony culture, “I’m surrounded by phonies”, “Pencey is full of phonies” (Salinger, 1964:5). Even when the action moves to New York, Holden stays, in the main, within a finely tuned collegiate culture of dates and moviegoing. This is clear from his description of the socializing context in a Greenwich Village nightclub named after the resident pianist: “Even though it was so

late, old Ernie's was jam-packed, mostly with prep school jerks and college jerks" (Salinger,1964:91). Therefore, deeply drown in the collegiate culture, Holden has unintentionally in his recalling of the three wandering days in New York City exposed to us an impersonal character shaping process working all through his development.

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